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RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Letter dated 14 April 1998 from the Chargé d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

Since I was not given the right to speak after the Russian Federation withdrew its draft resolution on Latvia, I am submitting the concerns of our delegation in written form.

The fact that Russia withdrew its draft resolution E/CN.4/1998/L.32 is a positive outcome of consultations that took place here, in Geneva, and in various capitals, since our human rights record does not give any grounds for tabling a resolution entitled "Human Rights Situation in Latvia".

Despite the withdrawal of the draft resolution, the attitude of senior Russian officials, including President Yeltsin's recent call for economic sanctions against Latvia, should remain a matter of serious concern to the international community. During these last weeks increasing pressure has been put on Latvia through various channels, including calls by the Mayor of Moscow, to boycott Latvian goods and several Federal Governor's activities supporting introduction of economic sanctions.

Latvia is grateful to all those who assist us in resolving complex and sensitive issues resulting from the illegal occupation by the Soviet Union for more than 50 years. Massive transfer of populations has occurred thus drastically changing the ethnic composition in Latvia. Since the very beginning of its legislative effort to solve the citizenship and minority issue, Latvia has maintained an open and cooperative dialogue with various international organizations and countries. Further political consultations are taking place now and we foresee that important steps will soon be taken to

facilitate the process of naturalization. Initial consensus on proposals for legislative amendments has already been achieved in the Cooperation Council of the ruling coalition parties. These proposals are submitted to Parliamentary Committees for consideration. The President of Latvia has taken a firm stand, calling political parties to show responsibility.

The extreme and categorical position of certain senior Russian officials is not conducive to the development of good neighbourly relations, nor does it promote confidence and mutual understanding between Latvia and Russia. For its part Latvia is ready to resume a constructive dialogue with Russia in an open and respectful manner. We hope that the Commission as well as the international community will support Latvia's efforts.

On behalf of the delegation of Latvia, I kindly request the Secretariat to circulate this letter as an official document of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights.

(Signed): Romans Baumanis
Chargé d'Affaires